

## Freedom of the Press

Throughout 2013, attacks on the press increased, and media practitioners continued to operate in a politically polarized and dangerous environment, particularly when reporting on election campaigns and activities. Long-delayed legislative elections were finally held in September, marred by serious violence, media repression, and ethnic clashes. Caught up in tensions between the ruling Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) party and the opposition, media outlets and journalists were attacked and denied coverage of pre-electoral activities based on perceived ethnic and political affiliations. Members of the media continued to be subject to detention, threats, and assaults by the government and security forces.

Constitutional and legislative reforms enacted in 2010 improved the legal environment for the press, but some measures remained unimplemented and prospects for achieving genuine press freedom are tenuous. Libel against the head of state, slander, and false reporting are offenses subject to high fines. In late 2010, a law on access to information was adopted and promulgated but not published. By the end of 2013, it still had not been effectively implemented, reportedly as a result of bureaucratic delays, procedural errors, and—in the view of critics and Guinean media members—disinterest or resistance on the part of government officials.

The official regulatory body, the National Communication Council (CNC), is mandated to support equal treatment and foster a diversity of views in the media sphere in Guinea, but in practice, the CNC has been associated with punitive measures against media outlets that do not support President Alpha Condé and his government. During the year, Planète FM—an outlet owned by a prominent opposition leader—faced a range of legal and regulatory harassment. In May 2013, its broadcasts were jammed. In July, Mandian Sidibé, the station's managing director, was charged with libel for comments he made during a radio program. The Magistrates' Court in the capital, Conakry subsequently placed him under judicial review, and in November the CNC suspended him from working as a journalist for 45 days. Sidibé and the radio station had also been suspended for the month of June 2013 by the CNC, but the Supreme Court overruled the CNC, allowing the station to reopen on June 7. Planète FM had previously been suspended by the CNC in December 2012.

Media workers face violence both from government forces and private citizens; many were physically attacked, threatened, or interrogated for reporting on pre-electoral activities. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) documented 51 attacks on the media in 2013, 41 percent of which were carried out by government forces and none of which were investigated successfully. In February, Idiatou Diallo, Asmaou Diallo, and Mamadou Bobo Barry from the private station Lynx FM, as well as Aboubacar Diakité, a reporter for *L'Observateur* and news website *Médiaguinée*, and others were physically attacked by RPG supporters in and around party headquarters, despite being clearly identified as journalists. The journalists reported that they had been accused of supporting the opposition and belonging to a rival ethnic group. In March, N'Sira Tambaya Bangoura of Renaissance FM escaped a mob following her reporting on a political rally. The premises of media outlets themselves were also targeted. Planète FM survived a series of attacks by armed police officers in April and November, and the station's headquarters were also riddled with bullets in March. In August, the radio station Bate FM was raided by soldiers twice and shut down because it had broadcast a political rally where the Condé had been booed by the public. The numerous violent incidents targeting the media in 2013 served to inhibit reporting on political issues and criticism of the government, and contributed to an environment of self-censorship.

Media laws passed in 2010 guarantee the freedom to open a newspaper, but in practice, economic difficulties often get in the way. Because production costs are high, newspapers struggle to secure printing equipment and distribute a significant number of issues. The average newspaper only prints a few thousand copies per issue and often does not publish with any regularity. A number of private publications, mostly weeklies, are published in Conakry and represent a diversity of views, though distribution outside the capital is irregular. The only daily newspaper, *Horoya*, is state-owned and avoids criticism of the government.

In a country with high illiteracy rates, radio is by far the most widespread medium. Radio Télévision Guinéenne (RTG) operates radio and television stations with programming in French, English, and a number of local languages. Numerous private radio stations operate throughout Guinea. Many citizens listen regularly to foreign radio programs on FM and shortwave radio. The government does not restrict access to or distribution of foreign television programming via satellite or cable, though few citizens can afford these services. There were no government restrictions on access to the internet or reports that the government monitored internet activities, and the internet is gaining some importance as a platform for voicing dissent, including through sites managed by the diaspora community such as [GuineeConakry.info](http://GuineeConakry.info). However, inside the country, internet access remains very low, at 1.6 percent in 2013.

Newspapers have difficulty securing enough advertising revenue to cover their costs, but since 1996 the government has provided increasing subsidies for both print and online media outlets of all political allegiances. Some critics have said that these subsidies are insufficient, irregularly allocated, and often poorly managed by the recipients. Some local newspapers and broadcast outlets are thought to be controlled by political or business interests. Low pay for journalists has led to ethical compromises, such as accepting bribes to suppress unflattering stories.

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Not Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

64

### **Legal Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

19

### **Political Environment**

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

28

### **Economic Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

17